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By WILLIAM COTTERELL

ATLANTA

Hunt

An attorney for Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt told a federal court Monday that Hunt was maliciously libeled by a conservative organization that linked him to the murder of President Kennedy.

An attorney for the Liberty Lobby, a Washington-based group that published a 1978 article about Hunt's past Central Intelligence Agency activities, said Hunt had failed to prove the author or editors of the report knew he was not in Dallas Nov. 22, 1963 -- the day Kennedy was fatally shot.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals spent an hour in oral arguments of the Liberty Lobby's appeal, but gave no indication when it might resolve the case.

Hunt was awarded \$650,000 by a Miami jury that found the Liberty Lobby responsible for an article in its weekly tabloid, The Spotlight, which said the CIA was ready to name Hunt as a conspirator in the Kennedy murder. He had sued for \$3.5 million.

The article by former CIA agent Victor Marchetti said the agency was angry with Hunt because he tried to involve the CIA in the Watergate coverup. Marchetti was not a defendant in the suit.

Hunt, who served 32 months in prison for his part in the Watergate conspiracy, was a former CIA agent and author of mystery novels.

Despite the Marchetti article's allegations, no CIA testimony before the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1978 ever linked Hunt to the Kennedy assassination.

"This was a case of, 'Who cares whether it's true or not, let's publish it anyway -- it's sensational,'" said William Snyder, a Baltimore attorney representing Hunt. "The article was not hot news. Mr. Marchetti is widely thought to be a CIA renegade like Philip Agee or Frank Snepp, who makes a career out of fingering CIA agents."

Snyder said the Liberty Lobby could easily have ascertained Marchetti's reliability, noting that he was once enjoined by a federal court in Alexandria, Va. from publishing information about the CIA.

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